An Explanation of the Divine Liturgy in the Greek Orthodox Church

By
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The Great Doxology
The Choir sings - *"Glory to You, Who have shown us the light! Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men! …"*

Thus begins the Divine Liturgy every Sunday morning – at least in the minds of most Orthodox Christians. In reality, the Great Doxology is the end of the previous service, the Orthros (or Matins) Service. This service, unfortunately rarely attended by most Orthodox, is a beautiful service that emphasizes the importance of the Resurrection in the Sunday morning services.

The Beginning of the Service
The service begins with the reading of six Psalms [3, 37(38), 62(63), 87(88), 102(103) & 142(143)]. These Psalms speak of the sinfulness of man, and his need for repentance. Following the reading of these Psalms is the Great Litany, in which we pray for peace in the world, the Church, the clergy and the laity, our Parish and city, and for our salvation. We then chant the hymn, "God is the Lord," which praises God for revealing Himself to us. Then we chant the hymns of the day, which teach us about the Saints commemorated that day.

Kairos
The next set of hymns are called the "Kathismata," or literally, "The Sitting Hymns," and are immediately followed by the "Evlogetaria." All of these hymns teach about the Resurrection of Christ. While these hymns are being chanted, the priest exits the Altar by the North Door (on the left), comes to the front of the soleas and performs a small service called "Kairos." During this service, the priest symbolically and mystically "receives permission" from God to perform the Divine Services about to be celebrated. The Royal Doors leading into the Altar are opened and the priest venerates the four icons on the Icon Screen. Finally, the priest asks forgiveness of those present, re-enters the Altar by the South Door and venerates the Holy Altar Table, completing Kairos.

Vesting
The next set of hymns includes the "Obedience," which is read, followed by the chanting of the "Anavathmoi." We then read the "Kontakion" and "Oikos" of the day, which once again teach of the Resurrection, followed by the "Synaxarion," or the reading of the lives of the Saints commemorated that day. During this time, the priest is clothing himself in his vestments for the service. There are eight articles of clothing which make up the vestments of a priest: 1. the Sticharion, or robe; 2. the Epitrachelion, or stole; 3. the belt; 4. the right cuff; 5. the left cuff; 6. the Epigonation (which designates an Ecclesiastical Office), literally "upon the knee," a diamond-shaped shield worn on the right side; 7. the Phelonion, or mantle; and 8. the pectoral Cross (if a priest is entitled to wear one). Finally the priest washes his hands as the "Katavasiai," a set of hymns describing the coming Feast, are chanted.

The Oblation (Proskomide)
Once the priest is vested, he begins to prepare the bread and the wine for the Divine Liturgy. A fresh loaf of bread, called "Prosphoro," which has been marked with a special seal, is selected for use by the priest. The seal is in the form of a cross, bearing three squares on the vertical bar, each marked IC XC NIKA ("Jesus Christ Conquers"). To the left of the middle square is a large triangle, bearing the reed and the lance from the Crucifixion on each side. To the right of the middle square is a single square of nine smaller triangles in rows of three. The priest then symbolically and mystically "re-enacts" the Crucifixion of our Lord, cutting the middle square as the sacrificed Lamb of God to be consecrated into the Body of Christ. Piercing the Lamb with the lance, he pours the wine and some water into the Chalice to be consecrated into the Blood of Christ. The priest then commemorates all the Saints, cutting the triangle on the left in commemoration of the Theotokos, the triangles on the right in commemoration of all the ranks of the Saints, and portions of the square at the bottom in commemoration of the members of the Parish, both living and those departed. Finally, the Paten and Chalice are covered with cloth, and the "Aer," a large square cloth, covers them all. The priest concludes the Oblation by censing the offering.

The Morning Gospel
The Gospel reading in the Orthros service describes one of the eleven instances in the Gospels where Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples after His Resurrection from the dead. The Gospel is read from the side of the Altar Table, and not from the Royal Doors, as in the Divine Liturgy. Following the Gospel, we read the hymn, "Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ…," and then Psalm 50 (51) is chanted. While the Psalm is chanted, the priest carries the Gospel Book out to the soleas for the faithful to venerate, just as the Myrrh-Bearing Women venerated the empty Tomb of Christ. When all have venerated the Gospel, the Book is returned to the Altar Table, and the priest commemorates a long list of the Saints, asking God to save us and bless us.

The Censing
Next, the priest censes the entire church, while the hymn honoring the Ever-Virgin Mary, "More honored than the Cherubim…," is chanted, along with the verses from Luke 1:46-55. The priest (or deacon) first censes the Altar Table on all four sides, then behind the Altar, and then the prosthesis (the niche where the bread and the wine have been prepared). The priest censes three times (as he does with everything he censes). He then exits the Altar by the North Door and proceeds to the center of the soleas where he first censes the Bishop's Throne, since this is where Christ mystically presides over the service, and then the icons on the Icon Screen (Christ, the Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, St. Barbara, the Archangels Michael & Gabriel). Next, the priest walks down the center aisle censing the right side of the church, then the Narthex, then walks back down the center aisle censing the left side. Returning to the soleas, the priest again censes the Bishop's Throne and the Icon Screen before re-entering the Altar through the South Door. He finishes by censing the Altar Table again, the Icons in the Altar and the Acolytes. The Orthros Service comes to a close with the chanting of the "Exapostilarion" and the "Praises" accompanied by Psalm verses, both of which once again teach of the Resurrection of Christ.

The Great Doxology
Once again, we come back to the Great Doxology. It is at this point in most parishes where the choir begins to sing, giving the impression that the Divine Liturgy has begun. However, the Great Doxology is the conclusion of the Orthros Service, glorifying God for His gifts to us – especially His death and Resurrection from the dead. At this point, the priest once again censes the church, but instead of walking down the center aisle, he censes from the Royal Doors at the center of the Icon Screen. The priest also completes the prayers of the Orthros Service, and as the choir sings "Holy God, Holy Mighty…," he makes three prostrations and venerates the Holy Gospel and the Altar Table. The Orthros Service concludes with the hymn, "Today, salvation is come into the world…."

Because the hymns change from day to day, from week to week, and from season to season, the length of the Orthros Service also changes. For this reason, although the Divine Liturgy may be "scheduled" for 10 am, the actual time the service begins will vary. However, those who are present for the Orthros Service are never late!

The Divine Liturgy – The Experience of God
The purpose of the Divine Liturgy is for creation – and especially mankind, the pre-eminent species of creation – to worship, commune with and experience God. It is for this reason that Orthodox worship is traditional, corporate, and unchanging -- traditional, because this is how mankind has worshipped God from the beginning; corporate, because God's Kingdom is one and His people are one; and unchanging, because God Himself does not change. We do not seek to recreate the past, or prepare ourselves for Heaven – rather, we come to be with God in His Kingdom. Fr. Robert Taft, a Catholic Liturgical scholar, expresses it beautifully, "What we are confronted with is not the *past* made present, or even the *future* present, but the *end* present, not in the sense of the *finish* but of *completion*: God Himself present to us."

The Kingdom of God
The Divine Liturgy begins with the proclamation, "*Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.*" With these words we are reminded that we are in the presence of the Holy Trinity – God. We have been raised up to the Kingdom to worship God along with the holy angels and the Saints (even if they look it, the pews are never empty!). God has also descended to be present with us on earth. The Liturgy takes place within time and space, and yet, it transcends time and space.

In response to the above proclamation, we respond, "*Amen.*" This is a Hebrew word meaning, "So be it," or, "It is so." What we are saying in a sense is, "I agree." The Liturgy retains this responsorial form throughout the service with the priest proclaiming and the people responding.

The Work of the People

This brings us to the meaning of the word "Liturgy," which comes from the Greek words "laos," (meaning "people,") and "ergos" (meaning "work"). Thus, the Divine Liturgy is the "holy work of the people." The presence and participation of the faithful in the service are essential. In fact, if no one is present to receive Holy Communion, a priest cannot celebrate the Divine Liturgy. Besides the theological reasons, it would be as absurd as a baptismal service with no one to baptize, or a wedding with no couple present.

It is within this context that the Divine Liturgy takes place. We are invited every Sunday to encounter God in a way those of the Old Testament never had a chance. This encounter requires our attention, our timeliness, and our reverence. Let us seek to spend as much time within the Kingdom as possible. Let us also seek to share this opportunity with our fellow brethren, and encourage them to join us.

The Great Litany

Immediately following the introductory proclamation, the priest intones eleven petitions, inviting the faithful to pray after each one ("let us pray to the Lord"). The emphasis is on *prayer*! The faithful are led in prayer and given specific things to pray for. This is a time for earnest prayer concerning the following:

1. *In peace let us pray to the Lord* – Prayer should be true and heartfelt. Our minds should not be cluttered with other things, distracted by the cares of the world.
2. *For the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls* – We ask God to send His peace upon us, and we pray for our salvation. This prayer is corporate – the entire Church praying together – just as our salvation is corporate. We pray that all of mankind is saved and comes to the knowledge of the Truth.
3. *For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Holy Churches of God, and for the union of all* – We pray for the unity of all mankind, both in civil and religious matters. We pray for world peace, but we also pray that the Churches of God remain unified.
4. *For this holy House, and for those who enter with faith, reverence, and the fear of God* – We pray for the church we are in, and for those who worship with us. The Divine Liturgy is not a time to criticize our brethren, but it is a time to pray for them. We should enter the church with faith, reverence and the fear of God, participating in the service, and not being a distraction. The Divine Liturgy is not a time to chat, gossip, or send text messages – it is a time for prayer!
5. *For our Archbishop, the venerable Priesthood, for the deaconate in Christ, for all the clergy and the laity* – The Orthodox Church is hierarchical, so we pray for the hierarchy of the Church, the leaders God has provided for us. First, our bishop, who is our spiritual leader. Then for the priests, our spiritual fathers. Next, we pray for the deacons who serve the Church. Finally, we pray for all the clergy and the people.
6. *For the President of our country, for those in civil authority, for our armed forces, and all the American nation* – We pray for the country we live in, since we are residents of this land until we are called to be residents of the Promised Land. We also pray for the President, whether we like him or not. We also pray for all of those in civil authority, as well as our military personnel. This is not an endorsement of any political party, but rather we pray that ALL politicians make wise decisions, which allow us to live our lives according to our Orthodox Christian Faith.
7. *For this city, and for every city and country, and for the faithful who dwell therein* – We pray for the city we are in, and for every city, once again emphasizing the universality of the Orthodox Christian Faith.
8. *For seasonable weather, for the abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times* – We pray for favorable weather, which in ancient times was essential for growing crops. Today, it means protection from tornados, hurricanes, tsunamis, and the like.

9. *For those at sea, and those who travel by land or air, for the sick and the suffering, for captives, and for their salvation* – We pray for those exposed to the dangers of traveling. Although the dangers have changed throughout the years, travelling is still a hazardous thing. Furthermore, we pray for those who are sick, suffering, and in captivity. Their salvation can have the dual meaning of being healed or freed, or of salvation from above.

10. *For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and necessity*

11. *Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by Your grace* – These final two petitions are prayers to guard us from general calamities.

Lord, Have Mercy

The response of the faithful to all of these petitions is, "Lord, have mercy." This is a simple response, yet it has numerous implications. "Lord, have mercy" means that we are dependent upon God for all these things. "Lord, have mercy" means that God is merciful – in fact, He is mercy personified. "Lord, have mercy" means that we recognize our place in Creation, and acquiesce to our Creator. We speak volumes with this simple response.

The Great Litany concludes by reminding us of the example of the Virgin Mary and all the Saints, and we are encouraged to commit ourselves and one another, and all our life to Christ our God. Then the priest prays, "*O Lord, our God, Whose dominion is inconceivable and Whose glory is incomprehensible; Whose mercy is infinite, and Whose love for mankind is ineffable, do You, Yourself, O Master, in Your tender compassion look down upon us, and upon this Holy House, and grant us and those who pray with us, Your abundant mercies and compassions. For to You belong all glory, honor, and worship to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.*"

Inaudible Prayers

This prayer, like so many of the prayers in the Divine Liturgy, is often read inaudibly. This was not originally the practice of the Church. However, as the hymnology of the Divine Liturgy developed, the practice of reciting the prayers as the hymns are sung quickly became commonplace. This is an unfortunate development, as the prayers of the Divine Liturgy are beautiful, and full of meaning and theology.

Savior, Save Us

Following the Great Litany, we sing a short hymn three times: "*Through the prayers of the Theotokos, Savior, save us.*" It is a common misconception, due mostly to translation, that this hymn is directed to the Theotokos, and not to Christ. The hymn simply beseeches Christ the Savior to save us through the intercessions of His mother, the Theotokos.

A Second Prayer

A second short litany concludes with the prayer, "*Lord, our God, save Your people and bless Your inheritance; protect the whole body of Your Church, and sanctify those who love the beauty of Your House. Do You bestow Your Divine Power upon them, and do not forsake us, who place our hope in You. For Yours is the dominion, and Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.*"

Save Us, O Son of God

A second set of hymns is then sung, once again beseeching Christ, who rose from the dead, to save us. This hymn is also sung three times, followed by the dogmatic hymn, "*O Only-begotten Son and Word of God, Who being immortal, yet did accept to be incarnate through the holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary for our salvation, and without change did become man; and were crucified, O Christ our God, trampling down death by death; You, Who are one of the Holy Trinity and are glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us.*" This hymn, composed by the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century, was intended to combat the heresies of the time, and to teach that Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully man.

A Third Prayer
A third short litany concludes with the following prayer, "*You, Who have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications to You, and Who promised that when two or three are gathered together in Your Name, You will grant their petitions; fulfill now, O Lord, the petitions of Your servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of Your Truth, and in the world to come life eternal. For You, O God, are good and love mankind, and to You we ascribe glory, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.*"

The Small Entrance
While the choir sings the hymn of the Resurrection, the priest makes a prostration and takes the Book of the Gospels from the Holy Altar, carrying it in procession through the North Door and to the center of the soleas. He then proclaims, "*Wisdom! Arise!*" and chants the Entrance Hymn, "*Come, let us fall down and worship Christ! Save us, O Son of God, *Who rose from the dead!*" at which point, the choir continues, "*we sing to you: Alleluia!*" (*During weekday Liturgies, at this point we sing, "*Who is wondrous among Your Saints.*") As the hymn concludes, the priest re-enters the Altar and returns the Book of the Gospels to the Holy Altar Table.

The Hymns of the Day
Several hymns are then sung following the Small Entrance: 1) the Hymn of the Resurrection (There are eight hymns of the Resurrection, one for each of the eight tones in Byzantine music. These hymns change each week on a rotating basis – the first week being Tone One, the second week being Tone Two, and so on for the eight tones, until the ninth week when we go back to Tone One.); 2) the Hymn of the Feast or Saint of the Day (This hymn changes for each day of the year.); 3) the Hymn of the Church (St. Barbara in our case); and 4) the Kontakion of the Day (This hymn changes depending upon the festal cycle of the Church year). These hymns are usually sung by the choir, and they teach us about the Feasts and Saints commemorated that day.

The Trisagion Hymn
Once all the hymns of the day are chanted, the Trisagion Hymn is sung while the priest recites a beautiful prayer, which speaks of the majesty and glory of God who is served by the Cherubim and Seraphim angels, and to Whom we ask for the forgiveness of our sins. We also ask in this prayer that we may be found worthy to be in His presence as we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. All the while, the choir is singing the Trisagion Hymn three times: "*Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!*" When the choir finishes the hymn, the priest turns to the congregation and exhorts them to sing more fervently by exclaiming, "*Dynamis,*" meaning, "*With power!*" The hymn is repeated once more with, hopefully, a little more strength.

The Epistle Reading
Following the Trisagion Hymn is the Epistle reading. A short exchange takes place between the priest and the reader, as the reader intones a verse from the Psalms and declares from which book of the New Testament the Epistle comes, to which the priest exclaims, "*Wisdom! Let us be attentive!*" The selected reading of the day then takes place, as the faithful hear the teaching from one of the Epistles.

While the reading takes place, the priest takes the censer and censes of the Book of the Gospels while asking God to "*Shine within our hearts the pure light of Your divine knowledge,*" so that, "*we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel,*" and live a life according to Christ's commandments.

The Gospel Reading
Following the Epistle reading, the priest blesses the reader(s), and the choir sings three times, "*Alleluia!*" which is a Hebrew word meaning, "*God be praised!*" The priest then proclaims, "*Wisdom! Arise! Let us hear the Holy Gospel! Peace be to you all!*" to which the faithful respond, "*And with your spirit!*" He then declares that the selected Gospel reading is from one of the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke or John – and exhorts the faithful to be attentive, to which they respond, "*Glory to You, O Lord, glory to You!*" The reading commences.

The Homily
It is customary for the sermon to take place at this point. In ancient times, those who were not Christians, and following the Great Schism, those who were not Orthodox, could not remain for the celebration of the Mysteries. Thus, the teaching of the Word took place while everyone was present. In modern times, everyone is welcome to remain for the entire Divine Liturgy, and so in some parishes, for practical reasons, the sermon is delivered at the end of the service. Thus ends the "Liturgy of the Word."

The Prayers of the Entrance
Following the homily are two prayers of the Great Entrance - the "Prayer of the Faithful," which asks God to grant that we may stand before His Holy Altar without blame or condemnation, and the prayer of the entrance, which is usually said by the priest in a low voice. This prayer explains that "*no one bound by worldly pleasures and desires*" is worthy to serve God – it is an awesome task even for the angels – yet, because Jesus Christ became man and sacrificed Himself for our salvation, we ask that God may count us worthy to celebrate this Mystery of His pure Body and precious Blood for the remission of sins and life everlasting.

During these prayers, the priest opens the "Antimension," a cloth Icon depicting the taking down of Christ from the Cross. This cloth has the seal of the bishop of the Parish (in our case, Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco), which represents the authority of the priest to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. No Orthodox priest may perform a Divine Liturgy without an Antimension from the bishop (this hearkens back to the first century bishop, St. Ignatius of Antioch, who said, "Do nothing without the bishop.") The Holy Gifts will be placed on the Antimension, upon which the Consecration of the bread and the wine will take place, changing them into the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Censing
After the prayers, the priest recites the Cherubic Hymn three times, in a low voice: *"We, who mystically represent the Cherubim, sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity. Let us put away all worldly care so that we may receive the King of All, invisibly attended by the angelic hosts. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia."* The priest then takes the censer, and if it is a Sunday, as he begins to cense, he recites the following:

"Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only Sinless One. We venerate Your Cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify Your holy Resurrection. You are our God. We know no other than You, and we call upon Your Name. Come, all you faithful, let us venerate the holy Resurrection of Christ. For behold, through the Cross joy has come to all the world. Ever praising the Lord, let us praise His Resurrection. For enduring the Cross for us, He has destroyed death by death."

Immediately following the recitation of this hymn, or if it is a weekday Liturgy, the priest recites Psalm 50 (51). All the while, the priest is censing around the Holy Altar Table, the Icon Screen and the faithful. When the censing is complete, the priest makes three prostrations and venerates the Antimension and the Holy Altar Table. He then turns to the faithful and asks, "*For those who love me, and for those who hate me, forgive me, a sinner*." Then, processing around the Holy Altar Table, he venerates the Holy Gifts, puts on the "Aer" (the cloth covering the priest puts around his shoulders), and picks up the Paten and Chalice for the Great Entrance.

The Great Entrance
As the choir concludes the Cherubic Hymn, the priest takes up the Paten and Chalice and, preceded by the acolytes carrying the cross, candles, fans (representing the Cherubim), and the censer, exits the Sanctuary through the North Door and processes around the church down the north aisle, and returning towards the Sanctuary down the center aisle. During the procession, the priest intones the words spoken to Christ on the Cross by the penitent thief, "*May the Lord, our God, remember you all in His Kingdom, now and forever, and to the ages of ages*." The choir responds, "*Amen*." If more than one priest is present, the priests turn to each other and say, "*May the Lord, our God, remember your priesthood (or archpriesthood for a bishop) in His Kingdom, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen*."

Returning to the Sanctuary through the Royal Doors, the priest places the Paten and Chalice on the Antimension, which has been opened upon the Holy Altar Table, and covers them both with the Aer, which he has removed from around his shoulders. Having censed the Holy Gifts, the priest returns the censer to the Acolyte, concluding the Great Entrance.

A pious custom has developed where the faithful reach out to touch the fringe of the priest's garments as he passes during the Great Entrance. This is based upon the story of the woman who had a flow of blood for 12 years, and was healed simply by touching the fringe of Christ's garments (see Mark 5:25-34). This practice should be encouraged to anyone who is in need of healing - physically or spiritually.

The Completion Litany

The "Completion Litany" is so called because it begins with the petition, "*Let us complete our prayer to the Lord*." It is typical in Orthodoxy to title a hymn or section of the service with the first word or words of that hymn. The Completion Litany repeats a few of the petitions from the Great Litany, and then adds six new petitions:

- *For this whole day, that it may be perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless, let us ask the Lord.*
- *For an angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies, let us ask the Lord.*
- *For forgiveness and remission of our sins and transgressions, let us ask the Lord.*
- *For things that are good and profitable to our souls, and for peace in the world, let us ask the Lord.*
- *That we may complete the remainder of our lives in peace and penitence, let us ask the Lord.*
- *That the end of our lives may be Christian, without pain, blameless and peaceful, and for a good account at the awesome judgment seat of Christ, let us ask the Lord.*

The response to these petitions is not the customary, "Lord, have mercy," but rather, "*Grant this, O Lord*." The culmination of these petitions is the "Prayer of the Proskomide," which asks God to receive our prayer, to forgive us our sins, and to make us worthy to offer the Sacrifice about to be presented.

The Peace

Following the "Completion Litany," the priest turns to the faithful and blessing them, says, "*Peace be to you*." This peace is the same peace offered by Christ to His Disciples after His Resurrection (see John 20:19). The faithful reply by saying, "*And with your spirit*."

When the priest blesses the faithful, he makes the sign of the Cross in the air with his right hand by raising his hand and bringing it down, then he moves it to the *left*, and then *right*. The faithful, however, see it as going *right to left*, as the Orthodox make the sign of the Cross on their bodies (Christ rose to sit at the *right* hand of the Father). It has been surmised that in the West, the faithful began to imitate the *motion* of the priest, and not what they saw, in making the sign of the Cross from left to right. Furthermore, the priest makes with the fingers of his right hand four letters – ICXC (the Greek letters that make the initials for Jesus Christ). In this way, we are reminded that the blessing comes not from the priest as an individual, but from Christ our God, through the instrument of the priest.

The Kiss of Peace

Facing the congregation, the priest persuades the faithful, "*Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess…*" and the choir concludes, "*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the Trinity, one in essence and undivided*." It is during this time that the Kiss of Peace takes place among the clergy (only if the bishop is present, or more than one priest).

The Kiss of Peace among the faithful has become the subject of controversy within the Orthodox Church of late. The practice of the faithful exchanging the Kiss of Peace fell out of use sometime after the 10th century, assumingly because of improprieties taking place. Recently, some clergy have reinstituted this practice within their parishes. Although not disconcerting in and of itself, the absence of informed teaching on the meaning of the Kiss of Peace is a cause for concern.

Five times in the New Testament we are told to greet one another with a "Holy Kiss" (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). This kiss is a sign of concord and reconciliation. Not only does this kiss signify the harmony of faith and love of the brethren, but it is also a symbol of repentance, as expressed in Matthew 5:23-24:

> *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar; and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

Saint Maximus the Confessor further explains in his *Mystagogy 17*, "The spiritual kiss which is extended to all prefigures and portrays the concord, unanimity and identity of views which we shall all have among ourselves in faith and love at the time of the revelation of the ineffable blessings to come." The Kiss therefore is not simply a greeting of those around you in the pews, nor is it an opportunity to "catch up" with friends on a weekly basis.

The Kiss of Peace *is* an opportunity for two Orthodox Christians to sit next to each other and worship God together. These Christians may have had a recent argument, maybe they have a habit of arguing, or perhaps they have made a lifetime of it – it makes no difference. What *does* make a difference is that these two Christians can worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – One God – in mutual agreement, and just before they declare their shared belief by proclaiming the Symbol of Faith, they can embrace and kiss one another in peace and mutual forgiveness.

Although our Parish does not formally exchange the Kiss of Peace, nothing prevents parishioners from sitting next to fellow parishioners with whom they have had a squabble in the past, and at the appropriate time asking for forgiveness. In fact, it is encouraged, for this is the true meaning of the Kiss of Peace!

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

The Creed, or Symbol of Faith as referred to in the Greek, was written in two parts at the first two Ecumenical Councils, held in Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), respectively. The Creed from Nicaea was composed up to the belief in the Holy Spirit; while the Fathers in Constantinople expanded and completed the Creed as we have it today. The Third Ecumenical Council (431) ratified the Creed, stating in Canon VII, *"It is unlawful for any man to bring forward, or to write, or to compose a different (ἑτέραν) Faith as a rival to that established by the holy Fathers assembled with the Holy Spirit in Nicaea."* The purpose of the Creed (from the Latin, "Credo" or "I believe") is to state unequivocally what the Christian Church accepts as correct belief. Anyone who teaches or believes otherwise cannot be properly called a Christian.

The Doors, The Doors

For this reason in ancient times, unless you were a Baptized Christian, in good standing in the Church, you could not participate in the remainder of the Divine Liturgy. Thus, the proclamation, "*The doors, the doors! In wisdom, let us be attentive,*" is a reminder of this time when the Catechumens and Christians who have been placed under spiritual discipline would leave the church, and the doors would be shut. Then, only the faithful would recite the Symbol of Faith together.

A Note Regarding Catechumens

Catechumens, from the Latin word "catechumenus," meaning instructed, in ancient times were those learning about the Faith with the intention of becoming Christians through Holy Baptism. This process was extensive and rigorous, requiring at least one year of study, and sometimes as much as three years or longer. Catechumens were required to attend the services of the Church, were instructed at those services, and their entire way of life was monitored. The Catechumens as a group were initiated, prayed for, taught, monitored, and baptized all in the presence of the faithful. They were well known by Christians, and thus their actions outside of the services were just as important as their word of desire to become a Christian. Unfortunately, the rank of the Catechumens no longer exists. In fact, practices vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, city to city, and even parish to parish on the reception of converts to Orthodoxy.

In ancient times, and currently in some Orthodox jurisdictions, the Prayers for the Catechumens would take place just before the command to shut the doors. The remnants of these prayers are included in the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy celebrated on Wednesdays during Great Lent. Although some priests and communities have attempted to re-establish the rank of Catechumens within the Church today, this version of the Catechumenate has very little to do with the ancient practice. To give a simple example: The Prayers for the Catechumens are completed with the command that the "*Catechumens depart! Let none of the Catechumens remain!*" Yet, not only do the Catechumens remain, but non-Orthodox, and even non-Christians remain for the entire Divine Liturgy. In today's Orthodox Church, all are welcome to experience the Mysteries of God!

The Symbol of Faith

Following the command to close the doors, the Symbol of Faith is recited by the faithful *(Official Greek Orthodox Archdiocese English Version)*:

I believe in One God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, True God of True God, begotten not created, of one essence with the Father through Whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man; He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; and He rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; and He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; His Kingdom shall have no end; and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets.

In One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come. Amen.

The *Filioque* Clause

Filioque is Latin for "and the Son," and refers to the addition in Western Christianity to the Creed regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit ("And in the Holy Spirit, … Who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*"). It was first introduced at the Third Council of Toledo in 589, and although it was originally rejected by Pope Leo III (who had the original Creed engraved on tablets and placed at the Tomb of St. Peter, where they exist to this day), in 1014, the *Filioque* clause was officially inserted by Pope Benedict VIII into the Creed recited by the Western Churches – an addition that exists to this day.

An Offering to God

The Anaphora ("offering back") is the lengthy prayer which culminates in the Consecration of the bread and the wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. However, we are offering to God from the very gifts that He Himself gave to us. It is for this reason we say, "*Your own from Your own*." It is God who truly provides, and God who receives.

Opening Dialogue

The Anaphora begins with a dialogue between the priest and the faithful. The priest commands, "*Let us stand well. Let us stand in awe. Let us be attentive, that we may present the holy offering ("anaphora") in peace.*" The faithful respond, "*Mercy and peace, a sacrifice of praise.*" The priest continues, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you*" – to which the faithful reply – "*And with your spirit.*" Again, the priest exhorts, "*Let us lift up our hearts*" – the faithful respond – "*We lift them up to the Lord.*" The priest then says, "*Let us give thanks unto the Lord,*" which prompts the response, "*It is proper and right.*"

This dialogue puts into perspective what is taking place during the Liturgy - we are presenting a gift to the King. As the created, we stand at attention in the presence of the Creator. This exchange highlights the point of the Liturgy – God offers us His mercy and His peace, and we respond with praise and thanksgiving. We lift up our hearts and give thanks to God.

The Prayer
The priest then begins the prayer of the Anaphora. This prayer is usually said silently, which is unfortunate because it is a beautiful prayer. Below is the prayer from the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, which is considerably shorter than the prayer from the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great. The prayer of Saint Basil begins with the Creation, and highlights all the main interactions between God and man, culminating in the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. St John Chrysostom condensed it as follows:

*It is proper and right to praise You, to glorify You, to bless You, to thank You, to worship You in all places of Your Dominion; for You are God ineffable, incomprehensible, invisible, inconceivable, existing always, as You do exist; You and Your Only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit. You have brought us from nothingness into being, and when we fell away did raise us up again, and You do not cease doing everything to bring us to heaven and grant us Your Kingdom to come. For all these things we thank You, and Your Only-begotten Son, and Your Holy Spirit; for all these things we know and do not know; for visible and invisible bounties that have been bestowed upon us. We also thank You for this Liturgy, which You are pleased to receive from our hands, even though You are surrounded by thousands of Archangels and myriads of Angels, by the Cherubim and Seraphim, which are six-winged, many-eyed, and soar with their wings***, …***

The priest continues the prayer audibly by exclaiming, "*Singing exclaiming, proclaiming the triumphal hymn and saying:*" – and immediately, the choir continues – "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord of angelic hosts, Heaven and earth are filled with Your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*" While the priest intones the previous line, he takes the "star" from the paten (the "Aer" having already been removed and folded during the Creed), and taps it lightly three times at all four corners. This is done to remove any crumbs that might be clinging to the star (he may also use the sponge to wipe the bottom of the star). He places the folded star with the folded coverings and Aer off to the side until Holy Communion.

The priest then continues the prayer:

With these blessed powers, O Master, Who love mankind, we also cry and say: Holy are You and all-Holy; You and Your Only-begotten Son, and Your Holy Spirit. Holy are You, and all-Holy and magnificent is Your glory. You did so love Your world as to give Your Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life; Who, having come, and having fulfilled all the dispensation plan for us, on the night that He was betrayed, or rather, surrendered Himself for the life of the world, having taken bread in His holy, pure, and blameless hands, and having thanked, blessed, and sanctified it, He broke it and gave it to His Holy Disciples and Apostles, saying:

Note the theology in the prayer – that the Lord "*surrendered Himself for the life of the world.*" His Passion and His Crucifixion were voluntary actions done for our benefit, for our salvation!

The Celebration of the Mystical Supper
The priest then intones, *"Take, eat, this is My Body which is broken for you, for the remission of sins,"* to which the people respond, *"Amen."* These very words were spoken by the Lord at the Mystical Supper, instituting the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (Matthew 26:26, 28). The priest then says quietly, *"Likewise the cup, after the Supper, saying:"* and again he intones, *"Drink from it all of you; this is My Blood of the New Testament, which for you and for many is shed, for the remission of sins,"* to which the people again respond, *"Amen."*

Truly the Body and Blood of Christ
The Orthodox Church has always maintained that the bread and wine, through the Holy Spirit, actually become the Body and Blood of Christ. This has been the belief of the Church from Her earliest days, as is evident from Justin the Martyr's, *First Apology LXV-LXVI*, written in the second century. The words of the Lord attest to this in the Gospel of John, chapter 6:

"I am the living bread which came down from Heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world … Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:51, 53).

It is unfortunate that in today's times, there are some who teach that the bread and the wine are only symbolic representations of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Jews maintained a similar belief when Jesus made the above statements *(see John 6:52, 59)*, yet this erroneous belief was completely rejected by the early Christians – and by the Orthodox to this day. Sadly, some modern Christians have resurrected this old heresy, but they are *"mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29)*. It should also be noted, however, that the Orthodox Church does not accept the Roman Catholic doctrine of *"Transubstantiation"*, nor its terminology.

The Consecration

Once the words of the Lord have been intoned, the priest continues the prayer inaudibly, *"Therefore, remembering this command of our Savior, and all that He endured for us, the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into Heaven, the sitting at the right hand, the Second and Glorious Coming again…"*

At this point the faithful kneel (except on Sundays and during the Paschal season), as the priest lifts the Paten and Chalice with his arms crossed, intoning, *"We offer to You these Gifts from Your own Gifts, in all, and for all."* He then places them back on the Altar and says in a low voice, *"Again we offer to You this rational and bloodless Worship, and we beseech You, and pray, and call upon You: send down Your Holy Spirit upon us, and upon these Gifts here presented."* Blessing the Paten, he says, *"And make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ. Amen."* Then blessing the Chalice, he says, *"And that which is in this Cup, the precious Blood of Your Christ. Amen."* Then blessing them both, he says, *"Changing them by Your Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen."* The priest completes the prayer, saying, *"So that They may be to those who receive them, for the purification of the soul, for the remission of sins, for the fellowship of Your Holy Spirit, for the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven and for the boldness to approach You, neither to judgment nor to condemnation. Again we offer to You this reasonable worship for those who have fallen asleep in the Faith, the Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Ascetics, and for every righteous spirit made perfect in faith."*

Some priests recite the prayer audibly with the faithful responding, while others pray silently while the choir chants the hymn, *"We praise You, we bless You, we give thanks to You, O Lord, and we entreat You, our God."*

Commemorations

The faithful arise as the priest intones, *"Especially for our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary."* The choir then sings the hymn, *"It is truly meet to call You blessed, the Theotokos, the ever-blessed and all-pure, and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, you who without corruption bore God the Word, the truly Theotokos, you do we magnify."*

During the singing of this hymn, the priest recites the following prayer:

For the holy Prophet and Forerunner, Saint John the Baptist, for the holy glorious and most honorable Apostles, for Saints(s) (Name) whose memory we commemorate today, and for all Your Saints, by whose supplications do You, O God, visit us. Remember also, O Lord, those who have fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection to eternal life. (Here the priest commemorates the names of the deceased.) *Give them rest, O God, where the light of Your countenance shines. Further, we ask You, Lord: Remember all Orthodox bishops who rightly teach the word of Your Truth, all presbyters, the deaconate in Christ, and all priestly and monastic orders. We also offer to You this spiritual worship for the whole world, for the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, for those living in purity and holiness, for all those in public service; grant them, O Lord, to serve and govern in peace, that through the faithful conduct of their duties, we may live peaceful and serene lives in all piety and holiness.*

The prayer continues, *"Above all, remember, O Lord, our Archbishop (Name); grant that he may serve Your holy churches in peace; keep him safe, honorable, and healthy for many years, to rightly teaching the word of Your Truth. Remember also, Lord, those whom each of us calls to mind and all Your people."* The faithful respond, *"And all Your people."*

The prayer of the Anaphora concludes with the following commemorations: *"Remember, Lord, this city in which we live, every city and country, and the faithful living in them. Remember, O Lord, those that travel by land, by sea, and by air; the sick, the suffering, the captives, and their salvation. Remember, O Lord, those who serve and bring forth fruit in Your holy churches, and those who remember the poor; and upon all of us, send forth Your mercies."* The priest then completes the prayer by intoning, *"And grant that with one voice and one heart we may glorify and praise Your all-honorable and majestic Name, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages,"* and the faithful respond, *"Amen."*

This concludes the Consecration of the Holy Gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ, and the Holy Anaphora. This series of prayers – or in reality, one long prayer – is the focal point of the entire Divine Liturgy. This prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving, worship and praise, encompassing all aspects of the Church, the cosmos, and Creation. We pray for all the members of the Parish and the Church – both militant (those who are alive) and triumphant (those who have passed to new life). We can now prepare to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Mercy of God

Having completed the Anaphora, the priest intones, *"And the mercies of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ shall be with all of you."* The choir responds with, *"And with your spirit."* Now that Jesus Christ is present not only mystically, but physically as well in the Body and Blood, His mercy extends to all.

Petitions for the Gifts

Three petitions follow for the Holy Gifts, which are now consecrated: *"Having commemorated all the Saints, again and again in peace, let us pray to the Lord." "For these precious Gifts, which have been offered and sanctified, let us pray to the Lord." "That our merciful God, Who has received them at His holy, heavenly, and spiritual altar, to a scent of spiritual fragrance, may send down upon us Divine Grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, let us pray."* The response to each of these petitions is, *"Lord, have mercy."* We pray that, just as the Holy Spirit descended upon the bread and the wine and consecrated them – made them holy – so too may the Spirit descend upon us and make us holy. The bread and the wine were mystically changed from common items in the world to become holy instruments of God's saving grace. We pray that this consecration be not limited to the bread and wine only, but to us as well! We pray that we too may become instruments of God's saving grace through the Holy Spirit, and the partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The petitions conclude, *"Having prayed for the unity of the Faith, and for the communion of the Holy Spirit, let us commend ourselves and one another, and all our life to Christ, our God."* The faithful respond, *"To You, O Lord."* The priest then says the following prayer, *"To You we commend all our life and our hope, O Master Who love mankind; and we beseech You, and pray, and supplicate: make us worthy to partake of Your Heavenly and awesome Mysteries, of this sacred and spiritual Table, with a pure conscience, to remission of sins, to forgiveness of transgressions, to communion of the Holy Spirit, to inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, to boldness towards You, but not to judgment nor to condemnation."*

The Lord's Prayer

As we make our final preparations to receive the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, we ask, *"And deem us worthy, O Master, that we may boldly, without condemnation, dare to call upon You, the Heavenly God, as Father, and to say:"*

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

The priest concludes, *"For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages."* The people respond, *"Amen."*

The Holy Gifts

Following the Lord's Prayer, the priest once again turns to the people saying, "*Peace be to you all."* The choir again responds, "*And with your spirit*." The priest again asks the faithful to bow their heads for the following prayer:

"We thank You, O King Invisible, Who by Your infinite power have created all things, and by the fullness of Your mercy have brought forth all things out of nothing into being; do You, Yourself, O Master, look down from Heaven upon those who have bowed their heads before You; for they have not bowed before flesh and blood but before You, our Almighty God. Do You, therefore, O Master, administer these Offerings to all of us for the good, according to the special need of each of us; sail with those at sea, accompany those who travel; and do You, Who are the Physician of our souls and bodies, heal the sick. Through the grace, mercy, and love for mankind of Your Only-begotten Son, with whom You are blessed, together with Your all-holy, good, and Life-Giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages."

The choir responds, "*Amen*." The priest then silently prays, "*Lord Jesus Christ, our God, hear us from Your holy dwelling place and from the Throne of Glory of Your Kingdom, and come sanctify us; You Who sit above with the Father, yet are invisibly present among us; let Your pure Body and precious Blood be given to us by Your mighty hand and through us to all the people*." At the conclusion of the prayer, the priest lifts the Lamb, exclaiming, "*Let us be attentive! The holy Gifts, for the holy people of God*!"

While the choir sings, "*One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.*" the priest kisses the Lamb, and breaking it into four pieces, he places them in the form of a cross on the Paten saying, "*The Lamb of God is broken and distributed, broken but not divided; forever eaten, yet never consumed, sanctifying those who partake of Him."* Taking the top portion of the Lamb, the priest places it into the chalice saying, "*The fullness of the Cup, of Faith, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*" Then blessing the hot water in the pitcher (Zeon) he says, "*Blessed is the fervor of Your Saints, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.*" The priest then pours the hot water into the Chalice saying, "*The fervor of faith, the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Amen*." All the while, the choir is singing, "*Praise the Lord from the Heavens; praise Him in the Highest. Alleluia!*"

The Prayers Before Holy Communion

Before the priest receives the Eucharist, he recites a long prayer asking forgiveness from God, and that he may be found worthy to receive the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. *"I believe, O Lord, and I confess that You are truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, who did come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first. I also believe that this is Your Sacred Body, and this is Your Precious Blood…"* Although this prayer was originally only said by the clergy, in many parishes today, this prayer is recited by the faithful as well. It is a beautiful prayer of preparation for those who are about to receive the Eucharist.

The Priest Partakes of the Eucharist

Once the priest has completed the Prayers before Communion, he makes three prostrations asking forgiveness from God. Then he turns to the people and asks them for forgiveness as well. The priest partakes of Holy Communion by first breaking off a portion of the Lamb and receiving the Body of Christ. Then he drinks three times from the Chalice, receiving the Blood of Christ. In the first couple of centuries of Christianity, all Christians received the Eucharist in this way, clergy and laity alike. However, due to misuse and practicality, only the clergy receive in this way today. Once the priest has received the Eucharist, he quotes Isaiah 6:7 saying, "*Behold, this has touched my lips. My iniquities shall be taken away, and my sins cleansed.*" He then places the remaining portions of the Lamb into the Chalice, and prepares to distribute the Eucharist to the faithful.

The Faithful Receive the Eucharist
Having prepared the Gifts, the priest turns to the faithful and exclaims, *"With the fear of God, with faith and with love, draw near."* The faithful approach orderly and reverently to receive the Eucharist. Please note some guidelines for receiving the Body and Blood of Christ.

❖ Holy Communion is truly the pure Body and precious Blood of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Although the Gifts are brought in the form of bread and wine, the Holy Spirit consecrates them into the Body and Blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy. Therefore, we must take care to pay special attention during Holy Communion, remain standing (as long as physically possible), and not allow ourselves to be distracted, look around or to be inattentive. Your focus should be on the very real presence of the Lord in our midst!

❖ Preparation for Holy Communion includes fasting on Wednesday and Friday, and a complete fast on Sunday morning (no food or water from midnight on Saturday night). The ONLY exception should be for medical purposes (i.e. for low blood-sugar, you might eat a small price of bread or drink a little orange juice). We should also prepare by attending services *on time* (If you were not present to *hear* the Word of God – the Epistle and Gospel – *you should not be receiving the Word of God!*). Finally, preparation from Great Vespers on Saturday night until Sunday morning Liturgy is encouraged.

❖ When you approach the Chalice, make the sign of the cross and say aloud your Christian name. Priests often know the names of those who come for Holy Communion. However, by giving your name, you are identifying yourself as a Christian seeking to be united with God through His holy Sacraments.

❖ Take the cloth and hold it under your chin. The cloth is there to catch spills - it cannot do that if it is not in place to do so. Also, after you have received Holy Communion, please wipe your mouth. If you do not do this yourself, please do not be surprised if the Acolytes do it for you. *(It is the custom in some Orthodox parishes to cross your arms when approaching the Chalice. This is also an acceptable practice.)*

❖ Please open your mouth wide to receive Holy Communion, and close your mouth to ensure nothing spills. You need not be afraid of catching any viruses or diseases from the spoon! *(Holy Communion contains alcohol and boiling hot water – two of the most effective sterilization components we have. More importantly, it is the Body and Blood of Christ, which provides life, not death!)*

After the Distribution of the Gifts
When the distribution of the Eucharist has been completed, the priest returns to the Royal Doors and proclaims, "*Save Your people, O God, and bless Your inheritance.*" The priest then returns the Chalice to the Holy Altar Table and combines the remainder of the particles on the Paten into the Chalice. Meanwhile, the choir sings, "*We have seen the true Light; we have received the Heavenly Spirit; we have found the true Faith, worshipping the undivided Trinity, Who has saved us.*" Having placed the coverings on the Paten and censed them, the priest says silently three times, "*Be exalted, O God, above the Heavens and let Your glory be over all the earth.*" The priest lifts the Paten and Chalice silently saying, "*Blessed is our God,*" then facing the people and making the sign of the cross with the vessels saying aloud, "*Always, now and forever and to the ages of ages.*" The choir responds, "*Amen.*" The priest carries the vessels to the "Prothesis" and places them there until the end of the Liturgy.

A Prayer of Thanksgiving
Following the Eucharist, the priest closes the "Antimension" while intoning a small set of petitions thanking God for our having received the holy Body and Blood of Christ. He makes the sign of the cross with the Gospel book over the "Antimension," and turning to the congregation, the priest intones, "*Let us depart in peace. Let us pray to the Lord.*" The choir responds, "*Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Holy Father, give the blessing!*"

The priest then prays aloud, "O *Lord, Who blesses those who bless You, and sanctifies those who put their trust in You, save Your people and bless Your inheritance. Protect the whole body of Your Church, and sanctify those who love the beauty of Your House. Do You glorify them by Your divine power, and forsake not us, who set our hope in You. Grant peace to Your world, to Your churches, to the Priests, to our civil authorities, to the Armed Forces, and to all Your people. For all good giving, and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from You, the Father of Lights; and to You we ascribe glory, thanksgiving, and worship, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.*" The choir again responds, "*Amen.*" Then they sing three times, "*Blessed be the Name of the Lord, from this time forth, and to the ages of ages.*" During this time, the priest goes to the Prosthesis and prays, *"O Christ, our God, You are the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, and have fulfilled all the dispensation of the Father; fill our hearts with joy and gladness always, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.*"

The Dismissal

When the above prayer is completed, the priest blesses the faithful, "*May the blessing of the Lord and His mercy come upon you through His divine grace and love for mankind, always, now and forever and to the ages of ages.*" The choir again responds, *"Amen."* Then he concludes the service by asking God to bless us through the intercession of all the Saints, "*Glory to You, O Christ our God, our hope, glory to you. May Christ our true God, Who rose from the dead, have mercy upon us and save us, through the intercessions of His most pure and holy Mother; by the power of the precious and Life-Giving Cross; through the protection of the honorable, bodiless powers of heaven; by the supplications of the honorable, glorious prophet and forerunner, John the Baptist; of the holy, glorious, and praiseworthy apostles; of our Holy Fathers among the Saints, the Great Hierarchs and Ecumenical Teachers; of our Holy Father among the Saints, John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, whose divine service we have celebrated; of the holy, glorious, and triumphant martyrs;* (the Patron Saint of the Church) *Saint Barbara the Great Martyr* (in our case)*; our holy and God-bearing Fathers; of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; of* (the Saint of the day), *whose memory we commemorate today, and all the Saints, have mercy on us and save us, as a good, loving, and merciful God."* Then, "*Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us and save us.*" During this, the choir prays for the priest, "Protect, O *Lord, for many years, the celebrant, who blesses us and brings us Your grace.*" Then they conclude, "*Amen.*"

The Antidoron

At the conclusion of the service, the priest distributes the Antidoron ("Blessed Bread") to the faithful. This comes to us from the early days of the Church when the faithful would gather for the Agape Meal (the Eucharist), and would partake of the remainder of the offerings. Today, the Antidoron is distributed from the remaining loaves of the gifts offered for the Divine Liturgy. In this way, all those who come to worship participate in the service by receiving something that has been offered to God, and distributed by God. We either receive the Gift of the Body and Blood of Christ, or we receive the Antidoron (literally, "instead of the gift").

If you have any questions regarding what you have read here,
what you have witnessed during the service, or about Orthodox Christianity in general,
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